

House Passes Historic Funding Increase for Veterans

Wednesday, November 07 2007

WASHINGTON, DC

— Today, Congressman Mike Michaud lauded last night's passage of the Labor-HHS-Education and Military Construction-VA Appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2008. This legislation increases the VA budget by \$6.6 billion above the 2007 level, the largest single increase in the 77 year history of the Veterans Administration, and \$3.7 billion above the President's request. It also makes important invests in health, education, and LIHEAP.

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"The increase in funding contained in this bill will provide the health care and benefits our veterans deserve for their brave and admirable service to our nation," said Michaud. "By adding funding to create more than 1,800 new claims processors, over 400,000 veterans with backlogged claims will finally receive the treatment they are entitled to."

This bill is designed to fill some of the key gaps in the medical service promised to our veterans. It will reduce waiting times for doctor appointments, and provide more to help veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury (TBI), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), mental health care issues and lost limbs so that they can rebuild their lives. Also included in this bill is \$125 million to increase the reimbursement rate for veterans who need to travel long distances for care from 11 cents/mile to 28.5 cents/mile.

In addition to fighting for the increase in funding for veterans, Michaud was successful in securing funding in the bill for a number of Maine-based projects, including:

- \$150,000 for Central Maine Community College in Auburn for a training program in precision metalworking and machine tool technology
- \$200,000 for the Charles A. Dean Memorial Hospital in Greenville for facilities and equipment
- \$50,000 for the Maine Primary Care Association in Augusta for health information systems in community health centers across the state

Other funding provided for in this bill live up to our nation's health and education priorities by:

- Ensuring health care for 1.2 million more Americans through community health centers;
- Issuing nearly 1,400 more life-saving medical research grants than the President called for to potentially find cures for cancer, stroke, diabetes, Alzheimer's; and Parkinson's disease, with new investments in NIH;
- Strengthening quality education for our children by training 51,000 more teachers;
- Giving extra math and reading help for 117,000 more children than the President's budget request funded;
- Increasing the maximum Pell Grant for college to \$4,925;
- Strengthening jobs skills and employment of 173,000 more adults, youth, and dislocated workers.

Another priority in this bill for Michaud was securing an increase in funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which assists low income households in meeting their immediate home energy

needs.

“Especially now as the weather gets colder, it’s important to remind my colleagues here in Congress that we need to properly fund LIHEAP. Though I will continue to fight for more, I am pleased that this bill includes \$2.4 billion in funding for the LIHEAP program. This is more than \$250 million over last year’s funding and represents a 35% increase over President Bush’s budget proposal,” said Michaud. “Anyone who has survived one of Maine’s winters knows that this funding is crucial to helping Maine’s low-income families and seniors afford the high costs of heating their homes.”

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